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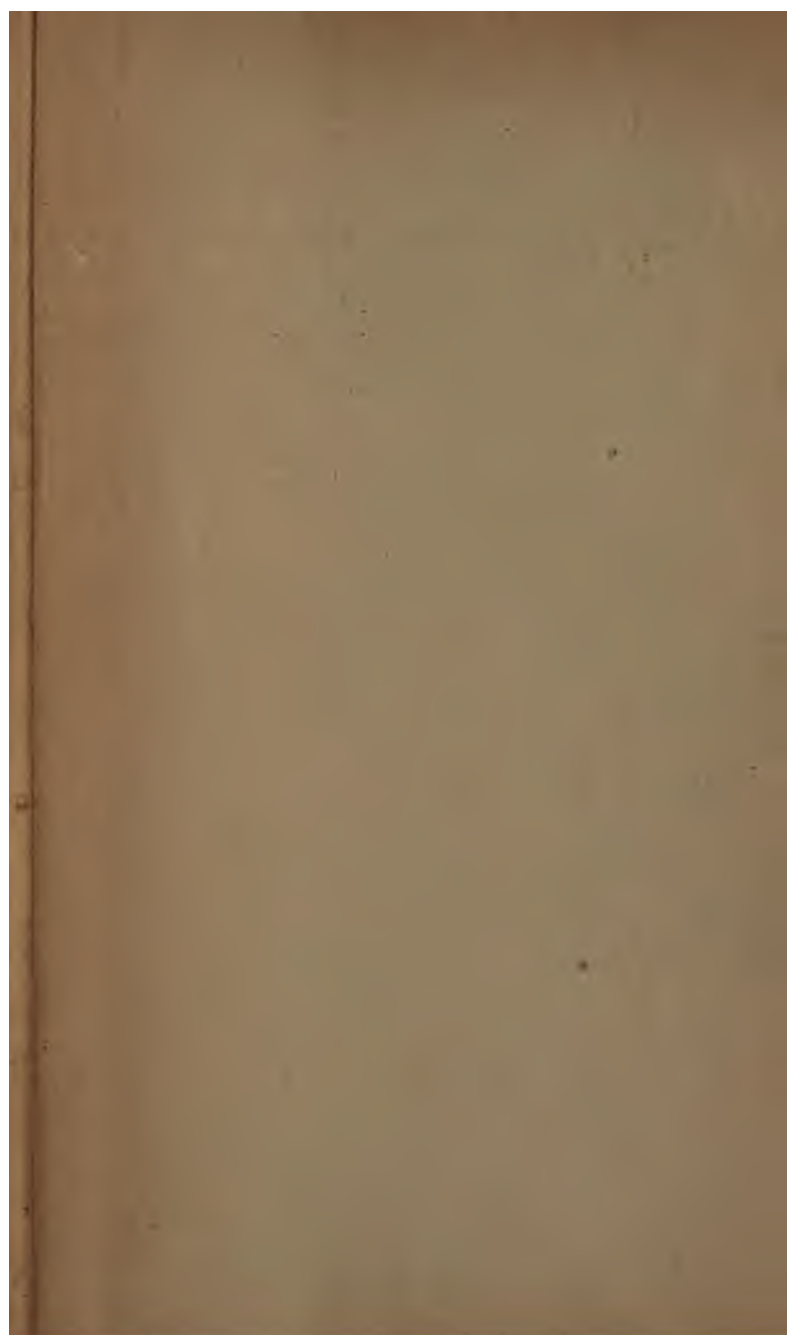
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No. 32.

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BY

H. B. TREE

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SIX AND EIGHTPENCE

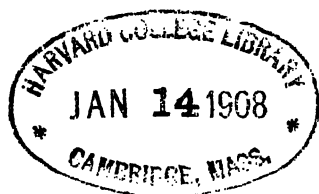
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SIX AND EIGHTPENCE.

CAST OF CHARACTERS.

CYRIL, } A loving couple, . . . } *Mr. Tree.*
GRACE, } } *Mrs. Tree.*
MR. CROOK, An eloquent lawyer, . *Mr. Chas. Colnaghi.*

SCENE.

Plain chamber in two. Doors R. and L. opening off
and a centre opening if possible.

PROPERTIES.

Writing table L. with books and writing materials.
Three chairs. Newspaper uncut on table. Screw office
chair R. Threepenny piece for Cyril and three or four
shillings. For Grace purse, stamp, money in it.

SIX AND EIGHTPENCE.

SCENE.—*An office with doors R. and L. and centre opening.*

CYRIL. (*heard outside L.*) I must see Mr. Crook at once—most important. Oh, Mr. Crook's engaged, is he? Very well, I'll wait in Mr. Hook's room till Mr. Crook's disengaged. (*CYRIL enters looking off*) What a crowd waiting to see the great man! One, two, three, four clients before me, and one of them a woman. She counts for three, that makes six. Well, I must wait. Patience! I ought to have learnt patience after six months' trial. Yes, I have been married six months, but I'll stand it no longer. Hook married me—now I've come to Crook for a judicial separation; married by Hook, divorced by Crook. Well, if men will go in for luxuries, they must pay for them. Yes, marriage is a luxury which makes divorce a necessity. Wheugh! I feel very awkward. I almost wish I hadn't come—it's like having one's photograph taken—or a tooth drawn. Now let me see how shall I begin, when I see the great man. Nothing like a plain statement. "Sir,"—that's a good beginning. Dr. Johnson always began with "Sir." It carries conviction. (*brings down small chair from back and addresses it*) "Sir, I ask your advice as a lawyer; as a man of the world; knowing as few do the trials of married life—I believe you are a married man yourself? I thought so. A year ago I was a young man, my temper was good, my disposition was excellent, my appearance was—interesting. Behold me now! I made a fool of myself. How did it happen? In this way: I became involved in matrimony; one broiling day as I was wandering down Piccadilly, longing for a breath of fresh air, my notice was attracted by the figure of an ultramarine Venus on a hoarding. I always had a weakness for Venuses. (*smirks*) How cool, how tempting she looked! I gazed, and read; 'To Slocumville-on-Sea and back for five shillings—cooling

breezes, miles of sands, piers, bands, casinos, donkey rides.' That did it. That night ere gentle sleep the urchin's eyelids kissed, I was eating prawns at the Grand Hotel, Slocumville-on-Sea. A month afterwards some friends, who had been vainly searching for me in the agony column of the *Times* telegraphed to London that my body had been found. I was married! (*despairingly*) The corps de ballet went into black skirts, and the noble army of mourning mashers carried their sticks half mast high. I was married! What escape is there for a susceptible young man at the seaside? He is doomed beforehand. Pigeon shooting is fair sport compared to it. There is something in the intoxicating influence of zoedone—ozone—the long path of moonlight on the waters, the strains of the German band mellowed by distance. There is something in the subtle perfume of shellfish that is fatal. What can a man do but fall in love? We met; it was love at first sight. Oh, that men were gifted with second sight on these occasions! I thought her an angel—how could I tell that she was the very—reverse! I dreamed of an ideal existence—a wandering Arab life on the sands—sharing with her I loved a semi-detached bathing machine. I'm not sure even now that the idea hasn't its advantage, moderate rent, no taxes, plenty of ventilation." (*takes up Times on table. Business uncut, with three holes, well pricked (close) with pinholes so that on throwing it over head he pushes his finger violently through and sees through eyeholes and pushes his nose through bottom hole*) Well, I suppose I shall have to wait another hour. (*reading*) "Court of Probate and Divorce," "Billing versus Billing and Cohen." Ahem! "Turtle versus Turtle. This *was* a suit—" Oh!!!—a suit instituted by the *husband*—incompatibility of temper—*just* my case—let's see. (*reads, very interested*)

GRACE *enters* L.

GRACE. Oh! I'm so frightened, I almost wish I hadn't come! Suppose my husband has seen and followed me; but, as if he could recognize me *under this thick veil*—and—as if it mattered if he did, now that I have made up my mind to leave him forever. That gentleman behind the paper is Mr. Crook, I suppose. I'm afraid to interrupt him. Ahem!

CYRIL. (*not having heard her come in, looks up*) So!

Another lady ! Crook seems to have a large connection among ladies. (GRACE *a little frightened goes towards door*) Rather a pretty figure ! I wish she would lift her veil. Neat turn of the head ; rather like Grace's before I married her ! Heigho ! Very like Grace's before I married her ! (*reads paper again*)

GRACE. I beg your pardon, sir. (*takes off veil. Her veil is thick and fastened with large pin which can easily be found and pulled out*) Are you Mr.——

CYRIL. (*starting*) My wife ! (*is just opening paper to turn it, and throws it over his head. It completely covers him*)

GRACE. I said, are you Mr. Crook ? (*sharply*)

CYRIL. (*recovering himself, in feigned voice*) Yes, madam !

GRACE. What an odd manner ! I wish more than ever that I hadn't come. I have a letter of introduction to you from Mr. Bayswater Jones.

CYRIL. (*starting*) Bayswater Jones !

GRACE. You know Mr. Bayswater Jones, I believe ? (*startled, staring at the holes in paper*)

CYRIL. (*aside*) Rather, considering it was Mr. Bayswater Jones to whom I confided my connubial woes, and who recommended me to come to Mr. Crook.

GRACE. Mr. Bayswater Jones kindly recommended me to come to you in my present trouble.

CYRIL. Bayswater Jones. (*rises*) How dare he ? (*rages*)

GRACE. I beg your pardon ?

CYRIL. Nothing ! Go on, madam ! (*sits*)

GRACE. They say one should hide nothing from one's lawyer or one's doctor. So, I will tell you everything. I have only been married six months, and I need scarcely tell you how unhappy I have been. I think if you only knew what a life mine has been——

CYRIL. Hang it all ! (*rises*)

GRACE. I beg your pardon ?

CYRIL. Nothing ; go on. (*sits, groans*)

GRACE. About six months ago—for my sins, I suppose—mamma took me down to Slocumville-on-Sea, and there we became acquainted with a gentleman, who fell in love with me at first sight. And I rather liked him. I don't know why, I'm sure, for he was by no means good-looking.

CYRIL. (*starting up*) Ah!

GRACE. I think what first won my heart was his kindness to mamma. He would carry her books, her parasol, her poodle, and her bathing costume, *all at once*. And I thought if he is so kind to mamma before marriage what will he not be *to me* after? Alas! I was mistaken, and so, before we have been married six months I come to— (*rises, whimpering*) Oh! I can't do it even now, when it's such a fine day, and Cyril and I might be wandering on the beach, as we used to in the dear olden days. Oh! if he were not so bad tempered. (*"so bad tempered" three times, with a loud vixenish scream at the end. Stamps her foot. At this point GRACE has her back turned. CYRIL tries to steal towards door, covering himself with paper. Is arrested by stamp of her foot, and resumes his seat*) I really wonder why they print wedding cards in silver; it would be ever so much better if they had a great black edge round them, and printed on them, "In loving memory of Miss So-and-so, on the occasion of her marriage to Mr. So-and-so," and, "Friends will please accept this intimation," with a little R. I. P. in the corner. (*CYRIL again tries to make his way towards door L. At this moment GRACE turns, comes towards him, he again shrinks back, and resumes his seat, she walking round him as his chair revolves. Every time CYRIL goes to seat makes business with seat swinging round*) Sir! listen to me, whilst I pour forth the story of my wrongs, whilst I show forth this monster to the world, whilst I tear from his traitor face the mask that— (*tears paper away*) Cyril!

CYRIL. Grace! Yes! I, your outraged husband. Oh! that I should be the witness of your shame.

GRACE. Shame!

CYRIL. What brings you here?

GRACE. What brings you here?

CYRIL. I tracked your footsteps.

GRACE. You were here before I came.

CYRIL. Yes! I tracked your footsteps before you came. (*crosses L.*) I mean—

GRACE. What brings you here?

CYRIL. Nothing! (*loud*)

GRACE. Nothing? (*very loud*)

CYRIL. Hush! (*pointing to door*) Take care.

GRACE. What is it?

CYRIL. There's a man behind that door. Whisper !

GRACE. (*whispering*) What brings you here ?

CYRIL. (*whispering*) Nothing particular.

GRACE. Why don't you answer ?

CYRIL. Because—because—I demand an explanation—why do I find you here, pouring out your private grudges to a stranger ? I mean a—a—comparative stranger ! What are you doing at Mr. Crook's ?

GRACE. Nothing that concerns you.

CYRIL. Nothing ! Great Heavens ! (*aloud. Crossing R.*)

GRACE. Hush ! (*pointing to door*) Take care !

CYRIL. What is it ? (*they resume the whisper*)

GRACE. There's a man behind that door. Whisper !

CYRIL. Great Heavens ! why are you here ?

GRACE. I came to consult a lawyer about obtaining a separation.

CYRIL. What ! You too ?

GRACE. Ah !

CYRIL. (*aside*) Hallo ! I've let the cat out of the bag.

GRACE. Oh, then we are both here on the same errand. Oh, that's very nice.

CYRIL. Yes, delightful ! (*she hums. Both sing. GRACE gets annoyed*)

GRACE. Oh ! don't, don't, Cyril !

CYRIL. Grace ! Grace, dear, since we are *both* of the same mind, *for once*, don't you think we can settle the matter in a friendly way, without scandal, and without lawyers' fees ? Let's—let's hush it up. (*coaxingly, after a pause*)

GRACE. (*indignant*) Hush it up ! No ! Scandal and lawyers' fees are just what I want. I'll get myself talked about, just to spite you. I'll be photographed in all the shop windows. I'll go upon the stage. I'll be a witness in a witness box. I'll be as notorious as ever I can. I'll be—I'll be a professional beauty ! (*smirks*)

CYRIL. A professional beauty ! (*sneers*)

GRACE. Yes, that's better than being an amateur beast.

CYRIL. A what ?

GRACE. A beast. (*loud*)

CYRIL. Hush !

GRACE. What ? (*CYRIL points to door R.*) A beast, a beast, a beast ! (*in his ear*)

CYRIL. Take care ! Anything you say may be taken down in evidence against you.

GRACE. (*looking through door, sneers*) Oh ! he's fast asleep ; he snores.

CYRIL. Happy, happy man, he snores ! (*sits*) He sleeps ; he's evidently unmarried.

GRACE. Do you envy him ?

CYRIL. Envy him ! Is not his soul at rest ?

GRACE. You, too, soon shall snore in peace.

CYRIL. Yes, yes ! (*in ecstasy*)

GRACE. I shall not trouble you much longer. (*in a rage*)

CYRIL. No, no. (*with unction*)

GRACE. Monster !

CYRIL. Angel !

GRACE. You shall soon be free !

CYRIL. Yes, as free as Crook can make me.

GRACE. Crook ! He's my lawyer.

CYRIL. No, mine ! (*loud, rises*)

GRACE. No, mine ! (*louder, rises. Business ad lib. till both pull up, pointing to the door and saying*)

BOTH. Hush !

GRACE. I shall not give up Mr. Crook.

CYRIL. You shall : first come, first served.

GRACE. I beg your pardon, ladies first, always.

CYRIL. No, I demand obedience. Obedience is the first law of—of nature. Did you not swear to love, honor, and obey me at the altar ?

GRACE. No, thank Heaven, we were married at the Registrar's.

CYRIL. But my right remains. I have been meaning to come here for over a week.

GRACE. And I, for over a month.

CYRIL. You'll tell me next that you meant to come the day after our wedding.

GRACE. So I did, the day before.

CYRIL. Confound the woman !

GRACE. (*after a pause and very coaxingly*) Cyril dear ! (*goes to him*)

CYRIL. Grace !

GRACE. Don't, don't let us quarrel on such a subject as this, my love. (*gets behind him and strokes his hair*)

CYRIL. As you please, my darling.

GRACE. (*putting her arm round his neck*) Time was when Grace's will was Cyril's law.

CYRIL. Don't do that, or I won't answer for the consequences!

GRACE. That time was very, very sweet, no doubt. (*changes from sweetness to rage again, and sidling up to door*) But business is business, and I will see Mr. Crook first.

CYRIL. You shall not. (*rises and crosses to door C.*)

GRACE. I shall.

CYRIL. I'm nearest the door, and here I stay. You'll have to walk over my dead body first. (*at door. Verbal struggle ad lib.*)

GRACE. Oh! I see that moral persuasion is useless, so I'll try physical violence. (*taps him on cheek lightly.* MR. CROOK *enters C. D. They seize him, and take him down stage backwards, and force him on chair at his entrance. GRACE and CYRIL rapidly get their own chairs and sit, CYRIL R. and GRACE L.*) Mr. Crook! (*They are both quite close to the lawyer*)

CYRIL. I beg your pardon, sir! You witnessed that assault! A regular case of assault and battery and cruelty. You will not hesitate to undertake my case?

GRACE. Mr. Crook saw nothing at all.

CYRIL. I tell you he did.

GRACE. He says he didn't. (*CROOK rises to go*)

CYRIL. (*forces CROOK down*) Be calm! there is the fact!—the door opened, and Mr. Crook came in just as I was reeling across the room under your violent blow. It's a clear case of assault and battery—my cheek is swelling visibly. Look at it!

GRACE. Don't look at it, sir. (*both take CROOK'S hands, CYRIL objecting to this familiarity on the part of his wife*)

CYRIL. I shall subpoena you as a witness.

GRACE. Oh! you're a boor.

CYRIL. A what?

GRACE. A B-O-O-R—B double O R.

CYRIL. There, Mr. Crook, you hear! Just think, Mr. Crook, that lady is my wife.

GRACE. And that—ahem!—gentleman is my husband. (*every time GRACE is coaxing the lawyer, CYRIL is indignant through his eyeglass*)

CYRIL. What have I done to deserve such a visitation of Providence?

GRACE. Why was it decreed that I should suffer so?
(*they both sit on either side of MR. CROOK*)

CYRIL. I loved her, as a lover only can.

GRACE. And at first I lov—well, I didn't mind him much.

CYRIL. But I've repented in sackcloth and ashes.

GRACE. And I've repented in sackcloth and ashes.
(*this through sobs*)

CYRIL. And so I've come—

GRACE. To get a separation.

CYRIL. Make me a bachelor, a widower, a co-respondent, and I will bless you with my latest breath. (*rises*)

GRACE. Oh! to be a spinster, once more. (CROOK rises to go, *they force him down*)

CYRIL. Allow me to explain.

GRACE. I beg your pardon.

CYRIL. 'Twas in prime of summer time.

GRACE. The first of December.

CYRIL. An evening calm and cool— (CROOK rises to go) Be calm and cool. (*Here a verbal struggle ensues. Both talk loudly together, telling their story ad lib.*) After you.

GRACE. No, after you. (*here again a verbal struggle*)

CYRIL. Be calm. (CROOK rises) You see the case is as clear as daylight.

GRACE. So that's the reason why—

CYRIL. You see us two here—and this is the bitter end of a bliss that I thought would only be buried in the grave.

GRACE. I scarcely know what first obscured the light of our honeymoon.

CYRIL. The fact is—

GRACE. In one—one word.

CYRIL. I hate double acrostics.

GRACE. I abhor cigarettes.

CYRIL. My complaint is this. From the hour that this woman took to answering double acrostics in the society journals—

GRACE. From the time he took to smoking cigarettes from morning to night—

CYRIL. I haven't known a moment's peace.

GRACE. My life has been one perpetual torment.

CYRIL. When I come home tired out with my hard evening's stroll in the park, she meets me on the doorstep—

GRACE. With a cigarette in his mouth.

CYRIL. She cries out, "My first is a Roman Emperor!"

GRACE. Nero!

CYRIL. "My second is a vegetable poison!"

GRACE. Nicotine.

CYRIL. "My third is a favorite sweetmeat!"

GRACE. Jumbles, or chocolates.

CYRIL. There, you see. In fact, she makes my life one long unsolved double acrostic.

GRACE. His rôle is one long cigarette.

CYRIL. Why should she object to the weed which cheers but does not inebriate?

GRACE. Why should he object to the harmless, necessary double acrostic? Why, I might support myself on the earnings—

CYRIL. But you don't support yourself; on the contrary I am deluged for subscriptions to all the magazines, and in despair I rush from the house.

GRACE. (*reaches across excitedly and knocks CYRIL down*) That's desertion, before he took to smoking cigarettes.

CYRIL. Before she threw me over for double acrostics, I swear I made her wishes my law.

GRACE. Who would have thought our love would have ended in smoke?

CYRIL. Who would have thought that our feather bed of roses would have withered so soon? (*shaking hands with CROOK*)

GRACE. Alas! (*CROOK has red handkerchief in breast pocket. GRACE cries, takes CROOK's handkerchief and wipes her eyes in her despair*)

CYRIL. Well, sir! (*rises*) What have you to say for yourself? You can surely not see that poor woman weeping, when, when, when I say—have you no word of sympathy?—she comes to you for advice, for comfort, she pays you your legal fee, and you sit there with your stony stare like a carved monkey. Well, sir, what have you to say for yourself?—A pure woman whose only fault is double acrostics. (*weeps*)

GRACE. Oh, sir, have you no pity? See, his great heart is bursting!

CYRIL. Shall he part us?

BOTH. Never, never, never! (*rush into each other's arms*)

GRACE. (*goes to CROOK*) How dare you come between husband and wife?

CYRIL. How dare you seek to trample down the sacred tie that unites us—to sow discord between two loving hearts? (*comfort one another and wipe one another's eyes*)

GRACE. Shall he part us for a miserable cigarette?

CYRIL. Shall he blight two lives for the sake of a paltry double acrostic? Never, never, never! (*turns viciously to CROOK*) Oh, miserable huckster!

GRACE. Oh, you mean grubbing trickster! My darling, I, myself, will roll your cigarettes.

CYRIL. I have found an object in life at last, I can answer double acrostics in the magazines.

GRACE. (*sneering and scowling at CROOK*) Let us leave his hard, unsympathetic presence. (*takes him to L. towards door*)

CYRIL. Yes, let us no longer listen to his insidious arguments. (*cross to L.*) But how about his fee?

GRACE. How much is it?

CYRIL. Six and eight, I think. (*CROOK is once more dozing*)

GRACE. What, each? That's a good deal. (*very crossly*)

CYRIL. Oh no, it's only one consultation. Husband and wife are one.

GRACE. Oh, you settle it then, my darling. (*sweetly*)

CYRIL. Oh no! You pay half.

GRACE. Why should I?

CYRIL. Married Woman's Property Act. (*BOTH business finding change*) I know I had a threepenny piece for collection on Sunday.

GRACE. Bother that Married Woman's Property Act.

CYRIL. That's three and fourpence each. (*GRACE calmly takes shilling out of CYRIL's hand while he is counting cash*) I have not enough. I am twopence short. (*they can't make things right, but at last GRACE discovers two postage stamps which she holds up*)

GRACE. Well, here are two stamps. (*they both go towards CROOK, one on each side, giving him fee*)

BOTH. (*in broken voices*) Thank you, sir.

CYRIL. Thank you for your valuable advice—but for you——

GRACE. Accept a wife's blessing.

CYRIL. Your simple eloquence has touched my heart.

GRACE. You have lured me back to happiness. Good-bye! Good-bye!

CYRIL. Heaven reward you. (*they are going*) It was all my fault, my darling!

GRACE. No, mine!

CYRIL. Mine, mine! (*verbal struggle. Bus. ad lib. quarrelling; suddenly they recollect themselves and turn again to CROOK*)

BOTH. (*fingers on lips*) Hush! Farewell! Farewell forever. (*exeunt embracing and talking*)

LAWYER. We shall meet again!

CURTAIN.



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